Best Practice for Grazing.

with Mick Alexander

Buffalo Fly – requires strategic approach

By Mick Alexander

The past winter has been mild enough that it has allowed the buffalo fly, (Haematobia irritans exigua), to over winter in the region and be ready for the summer season. In most years, a number of good frosts would have wiped out the larger population of insects, however many producers are already complaining about the buffalo fly numbers building. In a mild winter the fly can remain on the underside of cattle with little impact until the spring.

Buffalo fly causes irritation to stock, similar to a cross between a bushfly and a mosquitoe, irritating and sucking blood. Potential losses to beef cattle production in Queensland has been measured to be in the range of 15kg per animal over a 100 day period, with a moderate infestation of only 200 buffalo flies per animal. This equates to a weight loss of 150 grams per head per day valued at $2.20/ kg or $33.00 per head in a 3 month season. The value of the hide is also reduced when cattle develop skin sores as a result of buffalo fly infestation.

Producers need to take a strategic approach to management as the Buffalo fly may live permanently on their host, with the females leaving only to lay eggs in freshly deposited dung pats. Adult flies live for 2–3 weeks, and females lay eggs from 4 days after they commence sucking blood, and continue to lay eggs until they die. Eggs hatch in 15–24 hours. The life cycle from egg to adult fly takes only 9–11 days.

There are several methods for controlling Buffalo Fly, including:

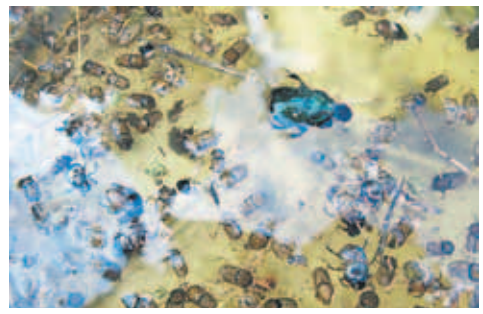
- Increase dung Beetle populations to bury the fly larvae and pupae
- Parasiticides (chemicals to treat the cattle)
- Buffalo Fly Trap
- Organic approved products (cattle coat)

To control buffalo fly, the most effective method is to reduce the habitat and stop the flies from finishing their growth cycle in the dung pat. The only successful method of achieving this is to build the introduced dung beetle populations to a level where they are able bury and shred the dung before flies hatch out. Although our industry bodies and governments spent more than $24M to introduce the dung beetles from Africa and Europe in the 1960's and 70's, dung beetles are still being harmed with inappropriate management. This is often due to lack of education about chemicals and their potential hazards. Most chemicals which are excreted from cattle in the dung are harmful to dung beetles to some degree. A good idea would be to ask the merchandise salesman which products are excreted in the urine as these will not impact on dung beetles. In the ideal situation, the strategy for managing buffalo fly populations would be to aim at building dung beetle numbers by:

- Treating only those stock that were affected
- Use the most friendly product that would cause the least damage to dung beetles
- Use a dung beetle trap and tunnel trap when possible
- Cull for susceptible animals
- Source an organic product or one which is excreted in the urine

Many chemical products used to treat buffalo flies result in residues in meat. Therefore, cattle must be withheld from sale for considerable periods after treatment in order to ensure that there are no residues present in meat products. This complicates the marketing of cattle during the buffalo fly season.

Buffalo flies have already developed resistance to some of these products and there is evidence that resistance is emerging to other groups of chemicals. Unless care is taken they will also develop resistance and become even more difficult to kill. Minimising the use of chemicals is good for the animal, our food chain and the environment. Many organic producers have been searching for alternatives to chemicals. In past years, many producers have used sulphur and more recently a registered organically certified product called Cattle Coat. These more natural products may be part of the solution along with a combination of the above strategies.



Dung beetle management will be one of the topics discussed in the coming "Technology of Growing Grass" workshops to be held at Emerald on the 2nd and 3rd December and Moura on the 7th and 8th December. For more information, go to the Grazing BestPrac website – www.grazingbestprac.com.au or www.dungbeetle.com.au or contact Mick Alexander 0438395255.

A new weapon to control buffalo fly

An exciting new product has recently been registered for use by organic producers to control buffalo fly on beef and dairy cattle. According to Keith Whyte (AC Backrubs), this is a win/ win for primary producers and for stock being impacted by high populations of buffalo fly.

Mr Whyte explained the new product has been registered by Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) as a certified organic solution with allowed input No 442A1. The two products offer an effective alternative to toxic chemicals which may affect both stock and dung fauna. The products:

- CATTLE COAT RTU DEODORANT
- PONY COAT RTU DEODORANT.

Mr Whyte said, "Cattle Coat" is simply a deodorant, that changes the odour of the animal therefore reducing its attractiveness to flying annoyances. Organic Cattle Coat is BFA (Biological Farmers of Australia) Certified as and allowed organic input in Australia and around the world. Diluted product is not harmful to fish, bees, humans or mammals and is classified as non hazardous. He said, we have been using Cattle Coat RTU for over 5 years on our property at Coal Creek Esk S.E Qld as a sound alternative to other chemicals. We have found that backrubbers are the most economically effective way of applying Cattle Coat RTU, which produces reliable commercial results against buffalo fly, lice and mite (Queensland itch). He continued, since using Cattle Coat RTU we have not had a problem with 3 day sickness, which is transmitted by mosquito.

He added, organic cattle producers in Australia, Japan and Spain using Cattle Coat have reported a level of reduced annoyance never achieved before with other Organic products. Cattle Coat RTU has no withholding period and is not systemic, which means it will not come through in the dung and upset the breeding cycle of the dung beetle. It is totally dung beetle safe and ideal for dairy cattle as it will not contaminate the milk. The product handling does not require protective clothing as there are no toxic chemicals to mix.

Mr white explained, we have a range of other products which are combinations of natural compounds including, "De-horning paste", which is a mixture of tea tree, eucalyptus and essentials oils thickened with Lanolin. We use this for de-horning and castrating cattle and have no fly problems and no infections. Weaners have their heads back in the grain bin within four days. The other excellent organic product is "Pony Coat Rubbing Balm" which is great for open cuts and wounds, saddle rub and Queensland Itch. We have no fly problems and nil infection as it has great healing abilities.

For more information go to the website: www.buffaloflycontrol.com or call and talk with Keith Whyte 0400 012838.